



# UPDATE

Montana Department of Commerce

## Statewide Travel and Fire Updates

As I reported in July's *Update*, indications of a record season were being predicted for the Glacier area through the July 4th holiday weekend. Tragically, in mid-July fires broke out on the west side of Glacier National Park and within weeks we joined other western states in the 2003 wildfire season. National coverage of the fire focused on closures and evacuations and implied that the entire Park was on fire. We could have spent the Montana Department of Commerce, Travel Montana's entire consumer marketing budget for the year with little hope of making a dent in the image that was being portrayed. Thankfully, a coordinated partnership effort, stemming at the local level, quickly reacted to the challenge. The group joined efforts and successfully delivered a proactive message to media that the "Park is Open" and there was still plenty to do in the Glacier area.

A public relations campaign was launched that utilized press releases and arranged media interviews with people dealing firsthand with the fire. The task force behind the effort was careful to utilize non-threatening terminology such as "precautionary" evacuations or "temporary" closures and to consistently point out what was open in the Park. This daily exchange of information was invaluable. In fact, just today we received an e-mail from a U.S. receptive tour operator thanking us for the daily updates. The

accurate and timely information gave her the confidence to proceed with her group's itinerary as planned versus avoiding the Park altogether.

The Montana Department of Commerce, Travel Montana's focus was to assist with the distribution of these daily updates as well as to develop a clearinghouse of information through our website. We focused on providing links to fire information and alternative activities in areas not affected by fire. Visitation to the fire site ranged from 627 visitor sessions the week the fires started to over 9,000 the week the fire hit national news.

I've been asked how the fires have affected statewide tourism. Statistics from our visitor information centers and major attractions indicate that Montana was experiencing a "softer" tourism season as compared to last year. And with the exception of the Glacier area, the general consensus was the fires were not altering their visitation numbers. My hope is that with the networking and partnerships within the industry, we will be able to minimize the negative press and remind people that fires are a part of nature and one of Montana's strengths is the authentic "back to nature" experience.

*Betsy Baumgart*

## Scenic-Historic Byways Advisory Council Meeting

The eleven-member Montana Scenic-Historic Byways Advisory Council held its first meeting in Helena on July 23. The afternoon organizational meeting introduced the council to its task of writing draft rules to implement the state's scenic-historic byways program approved by the 1999 Legislature and administered by the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT). Following guidelines provided in state law and conditions stipulated by the Montana Transportation Commission, the council will create draft rules for MDT and its Commission to review and approve before they are taken through the formal public rule-making process by MDT. MDT also requires that the draft rules only allow scenic-heritage byway designation on Montana's public or tribal lands.

The council's next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, October 7, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Cottonwood Inn in Glasgow. It is being held in conjunction with the regular October meeting of the Tourism Advisory Council scheduled at the Cottonwood Inn on October 6-7. All meeting and background information regarding the byway advisory council and the state's byway program is posted on Travel Montana's Intranet site: <http://travelmontana.state.mt.us/shb>.



## Did You Know?

- *Montana The Magazine of Western History* has won the national "Forest History Society 2003 Theodore C. Blegen Award" for the best article in forest and conservation history. The article "Wrestling with Horace Albright: Edmund Rogers, Visitors and Bears in Yellowstone National Park," was written by Alice Wondrak Biel.
- Bozeman rated number five and Missoula number 15 in a list of top 40 college towns in the September 2003 issue of *Outside* magazine.

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## Montanafilm.com Gets a Makeover

Facelifts are not just for the youthful longings of actors and actresses. This September the Montana Department of Commerce, Film Office website will fall in step with the Hollywood trend. In addition to a whole new look, the Film Office is excited to announce the launch of a searchable locations database and a "Featured Location."

With a little nip here and a little tuck there, the locations section of the website has been transformed into a user-friendly searchable database where location scouts and production companies can tap into the files of more than 150,000 photos of locations from across the state to find something that fits their needs. Users will be able to download printable versions of the photos displayed as well.

Montana may be known for its Big Sky, sweeping vistas and inspiring mountain peaks, but it offers much more in variety to production companies. The "Featured Location" section will highlight various locations to show off the lesser known, but equally spectacular possibilities Montana has to offer.

The Montana Department of Commerce, Film Office website is [www.montanafilm.com](http://www.montanafilm.com). Log on after September 1 because you will not be able to see this facelift in *People Magazine*.

## CTAP Communities Selected

The communities of Great Falls, Wibaux and the Crow Reservation have been selected to participate in a 9-month-long assessment

process designed to help Montana communities determine how tourism can help diversify and expand their area economy. The tourism assessment program is offered to communities through the Montana Department of Commerce, Promotion Division, MSU Extension and the University of Montana's Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research (ITRR).

"Over the last decade, 29 communities around the state have used this program to better understand the role tourism plays in the economic vitality of their area," said Mark Simonich, Director, Montana Department of Commerce. "Wibaux, Great Falls and the Crow Reservation now have the opportunity to develop plans and projects that can help local businesses and create new jobs."

The Montana Community Tourism Assessment Program (CTAP) is a community self-help program developed to assist communities identify what role, if any, tourism can play in strengthening local economies. The Montana Department of Commerce's Promotion Division and MSU Extension provide the process facilitators while the ITRR provides research services.

## Press Trips

Montana's tourism regions, along with assistance from the Department of Commerce, Travel Montana, have successfully completed a variety of press trips during June and July, including the following:

### Custer Country

*The Plains Indian Legacy Lives On—*  
four journalists, including one Italian

### Russell Country

*Riding With Charlie—three journalists*

*Dem Bones, Dem Bones, Dem Bad Bones—*

two journalists

*Immerse Yourself in Lewis & Clark—seven journalists*

### Gold West Country

*Celebrate in the Heart of Gold—two journalists*

### Yellowstone Country

*Experience the Working Ranch Traditions—*

six journalists, including one each from Italy, Taiwan and Japan

### Glacier Country

*Birding Western Montana—four journalists*

*Alternative accessible formats of this document  
will be provided to disabled persons on request.*

## Calendar of Events

### September

- 2-4 Affordable Meetings National, Washington, D.C.
- 8 Deadline to submit ad materials for the 2004-05 Travel Planner
- 16-18 Incentive Travel & Meetings Executives, Chicago, IL
- 27-10/4 RMI Mega-fam (MT/WY)

### October

- 6-7 TAC Meeting, Cottonwood Inn, Glasgow
- 7 Scenic-Historic Byways Advisory Council, Cottonwood Inn, Glasgow
- 20-22 TIA Marketing Outlook Forum, Austin, TX

*For all of the latest Montana tourism  
industry information log on to:*  
**[travelmontana.state.mt.us](http://travelmontana.state.mt.us)**



**Travel Montana • Montana Film Office**  
**Montana Department of Commerce**

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